THE BODY OF CHRIST—AN INTERSUBJECTIVE INTERPRETATION

Joseph A. Bracken, S.J.
Xavier University

ABSTRACT

In this essay the author rethinks the provocative remarks of Karl Rahner about the overall symbolic character of reality in his essay "The Theology of Symbol." While conceding the inevitable differences in perspective between a Thomistic metaphysics of Being and process-relational philosophy, the author explains how Rahner's "theses" on symbolism likewise make good sense within the context of his own process-oriented metaphysics of intersubjectivity as developed in previous publications. Then he applies this Rahnerian/neo-Whiteheadian scheme to the analysis and explanation of Christian belief in the Incarnation of the Divine Word in the human nature of Jesus, the Real Presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist, and the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

In one of his most influential articles, Karl Rahner sketched a rudimentary ontology of symbol with the intent to show first how the human body is the self-expression of the soul and second how the heart of Jesus Christ is thus an appropriate object of devotion to the person of Christ.[1] In this article I will offer an alternative metaphysical scheme with the same end in mind that Rahner presumably had in his article, namely, to defend a realist understanding of symbols as the necessary objective self-manifestation of the spirit, both divine and human. Why, however, propose an alternative metaphysical vision to that of Rahner if the latter's scheme seems adequate for the task? First of all, given contemporary postmodern sensibilities, most of us are aware of the conceptual dangers in claiming that a single theoretical scheme provides all the answers for any given problem-situation. Metaphysical systems are models or symbolic representations of reality that are never fully adequate to their task. As Ian Barbour shrewdly commented several years ago, models in theology as well as in the natural sciences should be taken seriously but not literally; something is always missing

[1]Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966): 221-52.

Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., is a retired professor of theology at Xavier University (Cincinnati, OH 45207). He is the author of five books and editor or co-editor of two other volumes. In addition, he has published numerous articles, above all, in the fields of trinitarian theology and philosophical cosmology.

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in the description of reality.[2] Secondly, an alternative metaphysical vision is desirable if only to avoid the slide into what might be called purely metaphorical theology, where one uses images and symbols in somewhat arbitrary fashion in order to appeal more to the heart of the reader than to his or her mind.[3] Because one no longer gives full credence to any metaphysical scheme, one effectively gives up the attempt to think systematically. Finally, because metaphysical systems are imperfect symbolic representations of the nature of reality, much is to be gained in my view from comparing and contrasting rival systems of thought. What is well formulated in one system may be imperfectly understood and expressed in another, and vice versa.

In any case, as part of the present essay I will review some of Rahner's theses dealing with the ontology of symbol and indicate how in my judgment they make equally good sense in terms of a neo-Whiteheadian metaphysics of intersubjectivity which I have developed in recent years.[4] Inevitably there will be major differences in perspective at work here also. As a transcendental Thomist, Rahner is committed to a vision of reality in which Being enjoys ontological priority over Becoming even though he himself clearly worked hard to introduce intersubjectivity and other process-oriented modes of thought into his theology.[5] I for my part have labored over the last twenty-five years to rethink various features of Whitehead's process-relational metaphysics so that the system as a whole would be basically compatible with traditional Christian belief in God as Trinity, the enduring reality of the human self, the resurrection of the body and the eschatological transformation of the material universe, etc.[6] But the key point here, as

[2]Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 119.

[3]See Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., "Images of God within Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 362-73.

[4]Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). There have been, of course, multiple attempts at setting Rahner's thought within a more explicitly intersubjective context: e.g., Andrew Tallon, *Personal Becoming* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982); Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998); also Kevin Hogan, "Entering into Otherness: The Postmodern Critique of the Subject and Karl Rahner's Theological Anthropology," *Horizons* 25 (1998): 181-202.

[5]See, e.g., Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity,* trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 178-203; likewise by the same author *The Trinity,* trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 82-99; finally, my own brief commentary on the latter text, *The One in the Many,* 15-17.

[6]See, e.g., Joseph A. Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); likewise recent articles in *Process Studies* and the *Journal of Religion:* "Continuity Amid Discontinuity: A Neo-Whiteheadian Understanding of the Self," *Process Studies* 31 (2002): 115-24; "Intersubjectivity and the Coming of God," *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003): 381-400.

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noted above, is that Rahner and I both are aiming at the same goal, namely, the validation of a realist understanding of the symbol of the Body of Christ, whether that body be understood as his physical body, his body under the Eucharistic species, or the church as his Mystical Body.

I. Rahner's Theses on Symbolism

Rahner's first thesis runs as follows: "all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily 'express' themselves in order to attain their own nature."[7] This is a somewhat paradoxical statement, if taken literally. One could certainly make the case that human beings have to express themselves in order to attain their own nature. Perhaps even higher-order animals have such a need also. But do lower-order animal species lacking a brain and central nervous system, plants of various kinds and, above all, inanimate things likewise have a need to express themselves in order to attain their own nature? In response, one could counter-argue that Rahner was making a metaphysical assertion, one that can only be understood analogically in terms of the different levels of existence and activity within nature. I would certainly concur. But, if so, what is the nature of that deeper metaphysical insight? My supposition in this article is that Rahner was at least implicitly working with a dialectical understanding of subjectivity and objectivity: above all, human subjectivity and objectivity but likewise, given his reference to "all beings" in the above-cited text, with subjectivity and objectivity wherever it is to be found, even among the three divine persons of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Subjectivity, in other words, does not make sense except in terms of objectivity, and objectivity is meaningless apart from reference to subjectivity. That is, subjects must express themselves in some fashion objectively so as to be intelligible both to themselves and to other subjects. For subjectivity in and of itself is radically indeterminate; that is, it is a principle of potentiality which becomes actual only insofar as it here and now objectifies itself, expresses itself, in some determinate form. Yet, once it thus achieves actuality, it can appropriate itself, make its own what it has just become, only through a new exercise of potentiality and thus through a new form of self-objectification or self-actualization. Thus there is within any given subject of experience an ongoing dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, potentiality and actuality, which the subject itself and other subjects of experience in its environment must inevitably respect in order to infer from these successive acts of self-objectification or self-actualization

[7]Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol," 224.

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what is gradually taking shape within an entity as a still incomplete historical reality.

> Given this surmise on my part, let us follow what Rahner says in "The Theology of the Symbol" supporting his initial thesis.
>
> Being *as* such, and hence *as* one (*ens* as *unum*) for the fulfillment of its being and its unity, emerges into a plurality—of which the supreme mode is the Trinity. The distinct moments deriving from the 'one' which make for the perfection of its unity stem essentially, i.e., by their origin in and from another, from this primary unity: they have produced a more primary and basic 'agreement' with it than anything produced by efficient causality.[8]

Entities which are related to one another through efficient causality are normally separate from one another. The one is the cause; the other is the effect. What Rahner is describing here is rather a differentiated unity, one which is achieved only in and through the self-differentiation of the "one" into the "many" and yet the intrinsic bondedness of the "many" to one another in virtue of their common originating source. Yet, one may ask, what is the unity here being described? One possibility, as suggested above, is that it is the unity of a subject of experience which expresses or objectifies itself in a variety of ways, always the same and yet always different. There is, to be sure, one other possibility, namely, the unity of a corporate "self" or community of individual subjects of experience which by their dynamic interrelatedness constitute the unity of a specifically social reality. Moreover, as we shall see below, this higher-level type of unity could apply to the Trinity and to all created forms of community. But for the moment we will remain with Rahner in his own focus on being in terms of individual entities and their necessary self-expression in a variety of ways.

> The self-constitutive act whereby a being constitutes itself as a plurality which leads to its fulfillment or rather (in certain circumstances) which is a reality given with the perfection of its being, is however the condition of possibility of possession of self in knowledge and love. . . . 'Being present to itself' is only another way of describing the actuality, that is, the intrinsic self-realization of the being.[9]

Here too I would urge that this paragraph makes good sense in terms of the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. That is, subjects of experience come to self-possession in knowledge and

[8]Ibid., 228.
[9]Ibid., 229.

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love through ongoing appropriation of their own forms of objectivity or self-expression. But, if this is to be analogously true not just of human beings but of all beings whatsoever, then in my judgment the metaphysical vision of Alfred North Whitehead could be introduced (albeit with some key modifications to be noted below) to confirm Rahner's assertion here. For Whitehead claims that "the final real things of which the world is made up" are actual entities or actual occasions, that is, momentary self-constituting subjects of experience.[10] Moreover, each actual occasion is not only an immaterial subject of experience but also a "superject," an objective physical reality available for "prehension" (feeling-level assimilation) by other subjects of experience.[11] Hence, the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity is valid at every level of existence and activity within this world according to Whitehead.

Here one could immediately object that one has never seen or otherwise experienced an individual actual occasion either as an immaterial subject of experience or as a superject, its corresponding physical reality. Whitehead's response is that our senses are not able to grasp these individual subjects of experience and their physical counterparts. Instead, we perceive "societies" or aggregates of these subject-superjects with an enduring form or pattern of dynamic interrelatedness.[12] As he comments, "[i]n the philosophy of organism it is not 'substance' which is permanent but 'form.'"[13] Patterns of interrelated energy-events below the level of conscious perception are what we humans commonly identify as ongoing "things" or "physical reality."

II. A Neo-Whiteheadian Counter-Proposal

What Whitehead does not discuss, however, is where the form or pattern is located when one set of actual occasions (interrelated subjects of experience) has expired and another is still in process of formation or "concrescence". Does the pattern have to be regenerated with each new set of actual occasions and, if so, what guarantee is there that it will remain the same from one moment to the next? My proposal for many years now has been that the form or pattern of existence proper to a set of actual occasions is largely derived from its physical envi-

[10]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology,* Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 18.

[11]Ibid., 29: "An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences. It is subject-superject, and neither half of this description can for a moment be lost sight of."

[12]Ibid., 34.

[13]Ibid., 29.

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ronment when the latter is understood as a structured field of activity for the present set of actual occasions and their predecessors. In this way, the principle of continuity for a Whiteheadian society is not some underlying thing or substance but a structured field of activity for successive generations of actual occasions, each of which contributes its own individuated form or pattern of existence to the overall structure of the field.

The details of this scheme are available elsewhere[14] and in any case are not important for the argument of this essay. What is important is that what Rahner calls the soul in his article on the ontology of symbol is within this scheme at every moment a newly concrescing subject of experience (actual occasion) and what Rahner calls the body is its corresponding objective field of activity already heavily structured by predecessor actual occasions (momentary subjects of experience). Furthermore, the basic relationship between body and soul as enuntiated by Rahner likewise holds true (with some key differences) in this neo-Whiteheadian scheme. That is, the subject of experience constitutive of the soul at any given moment "prehends" (grasps on a feeling-level) the objective structured field of activity proper to its body, incorporates that antecedent structure into its own self-constitution by way of an implicit "decision", and thereby through its "decision" either confirms or subtly alters the structure of the field. In Thomist language, it "informs" the field as part of its own being or essence. The field becomes the outward expression or symbol of the current subject of experience. An immaterial subject of experience and its objective field of activity are thus at any given moment two sides of one and the same ontological reality much as soul and body are for Rahner. To quote Rahner's third thesis, "the body is the symbol of the soul, in as much as it is formed as the self-realization of the soul, though it is not adequately this, and the soul renders itself present and makes its 'appearance' in the body which is distinct from it."[15]

There are, as noted above, still some significant differences in these two proposals for the understanding of what is meant by the soul-body relationship. Rahner as a Thomist would give ontological priority to form over matter since it is form which is primarily active in any given conjunction of form and matter. As a Whiteheadian I give priority to matter over form. Subjects of experience in dynamic interrelation, the equivalent of "matter" in the Thomist scheme, constantly

[14]See, e.g., Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1991), 39-73; and *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 146-55.

[15]Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol," 247.

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give rise to new patterns of existence and activity, the equivalent of "form" in the Thomist scheme; hence, the form is relatively passive and matter is active within this neo-Whiteheadian scheme. But my primary emphasis here is that Rahner's theses in support of an ontology of symbol seem to work just as well within this neo-Whiteheadian framework as they do in the Thomist metaphysics to which Rahner himself makes appeal. Furthermore, as I will indicate below, one can use this neo-Whiteheadian adaptation of Rahner's ontology of symbol to explain in more strongly realist terms the Incarnation, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

III. Application to the God-World Relationship

As already noted, the key factor in my understanding of symbol is the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Subjectivity is represented by actual occasions or momentary subjects of experience in their processes of concrescence ending in a self-constituting "decision" (whether conscious or in most cases below the level of consciousness). Objectivity is represented by the structured field of activity out of which the individual subject of experience arises and to which it contributes its own pattern of existence and activity. If we first apply this scheme to an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, then we can say that the divine persons as three dynamically interrelated "subjectivities" or distinct centers of existence and activity preside together over an infinite field of activity, albeit from three distinct perspectives. That is, they form a Whiteheadian "structured society" or complex set of subsocieties corresponding to their reality as individual divine persons with an all-embracing shared field of activity. They are one God, not three gods in close collaboration, because one and the same field is the objective expression of their identity both as individual persons and as a community.[16] The field is, in other words, their "divine matrix," namely, the ontological ground of being or vital source for their objective co-existence as a community of persons. Furthermore, given their joint decision to create, this same divine

[16]The deeper metaphysical issue here is whether one believes that in the end only individual entities exist and that communities and other social realities into which they aggregate are strictly secondary and contingent realities, or whether one believes that individual entities are made up of interacting parts or members and themselves contribute as parts or members to still other higher-order specifically social realities such as communities or natural environments. In terms of the latter alternative, belief that the Trinity is a community of persons does not imply tritheism but serves as the prime analogate for a social ontology.

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matrix or common field of activity for the divine persons serves as the ontological ground of being for the world of creation.[17]

The world of creation, accordingly, exists within the field of activity proper to the divine persons but as a complex subset of fields of activity for the innumerable subjects of experience constituting the things of this world (both animate and inanimate) at any given moment. I base this metaphysical assumption, at least in part, on empirical grounds. Among natural scientists it is generally accepted that lower-level fields of existence and activity within nature function within higher-level fields of activity without loss of ontological integrity. An atom, for example, is still an atom when it is part of a molecule. A molecule is still a molecule when it becomes part of a cell, etc. The structure of the atom, to be sure, affects the functioning of the molecule, just as the structure of the molecule affects the functioning of the cell; but there is likewise no question that the atom is itself affected by its functioning within the molecule, and the molecule is affected by its role within the life of the cell. So there is mutual influence between the higher-level and lower-level fields of activity within Nature even as they remain ontologically distinct from one another. Hence, creation as a whole can exist within the field of activity proper to the divine persons and be sustained by the same principle of divine life as the divine persons and yet possess its own ontological integrity.

IV. The Physical Body of Christ

Within this scheme, therefore, the human nature of Jesus at any given moment is a finite field of activity structured by all the energy-events (actual occasions) constituting his physical body from moment to moment but above all by the decisions made by his "soul" or principle of subjective self-awareness at the same time. But, if so, what is the relation of this soul-body combination to the Divine Word as the "Son" of the Eternal "Father"?[18] Following Rahner's lead here, we will first look at the relation of the Son as the Logos to the Father. As Rahner sees it, the Logos is already the "symbol" of the Father: "the inward symbol which remains distinct from what is symbolized, which is constituted by what is symbolized, where what is symbolized expresses itself and possesses itself."[19] In terms of my own theory, Rahner's statement can be further explained thus: the Father and the Word co-possess

[17]See Bracken, Society and Spirit, 123-60; likewise, *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link between East and West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 52-69.

[18]For the sake of convenience, I use the traditional masculine names for the persons of the Trinity even though I (and presumably the reader as well) am fully aware of the strictly metaphorical character of these symbols.

[19]Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol," 236.

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the same infinite field of activity, albeit from different interrelated perspectives. The Father gives himself totally to the Son, and the Son gives himself totally to the Father so as to constitute one and the same shared field of activity.

The Divine Word, in turn, incorporates into this divine field of activity the finite field of activity proper to Jesus in his human nature. This creaturely field of activity becomes part of the divine field of activity, effectively lives in virtue of the divine life, but in a way which allows it to continue to be its own independent finite reality. Yet, given that the divine field of activity and the finite field of activity proper to Jesus in his humanity interpenetrate and mutually affect one another, how do the subjectivity proper to the divine Word and the finite subjectivity of Jesus interrelate? The fields may interpenetrate but the subjectivities within the fields must remain distinct. Here we may appeal to what Rahner calls "the axiom of all relationship between God and creature" in a related essay on the theology of the Incarnation:

> the closeness and the distance, the submissiveness and the independence of the creature do not grow in inverse but in like proportion. Thus Christ is most radically man, and his humanity is the freest and most independent, not in spite of, but because of its being taken up, by being constituted as the self-utterance of God.[20]

Just as the Eternal Father and the Divine Word within the Trinity freely but necessarily give themselves totally to one another so as to co-constitute their ontological unity as one God, so the subjectivity of the Word and the human subjectivity of Jesus at every moment freely give themselves to one another so as to constitute the personhood or ontological integrity of the Word Incarnate. Two fields of activity ontologically distinct from one another (the one infinite and the other finite) achieve a dynamic unity in virtue of the intersubjective relationship between the subjectivity of the Divine Word and the subjectivity of Jesus at every moment.

Was Jesus ever tempted to break off this harmonious relationship with the Divine Word and seek a false sense of independence both from the Word and from the eternal Father (and the Holy Spirit) with whom the Word was intimately joined? Various Gospel passages would lead one to believe that Jesus periodically experienced stress in that relationship and had recourse to prayer as a result; the so-called agony in the garden (Lk 22: 39-46) would be the most obvious example. But what helped Jesus to overcome these temptations to false independence

[20]Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations* 4: 117.

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would surely have been his entire past history of living in a close symbiotic relationship with the Divine Word in the Word's own relationship with the Father and the Spirit. How conscious Jesus was of that relationship and of its subtle influence on his decisions from moment to moment will inevitably remain a matter of conjecture. But, unlike other human beings with their sin-scarred personal history, he presumably had no sense of guilt as a result of past moral failures and thus no reason to doubt the practical efficacy of the ongoing relationship with God as *Abba* (Father).

The key point of this article, however, is to see how Rahner's ontology and theology of symbol make good sense (in some ways perhaps even better sense) in terms of my own neo-Whiteheadian approach to intersubjectivity and the shared field of activity co-constituted by opposing subjects of experience. To give just one example, matter and form within the Thomist scheme may well be said to interpenetrate so as to form one unitary substantial reality. But the physical substance which they co-constitute does not interpenetrate with other physical substances. Material substances have purely external relations to one another since each is constituted as such in virtue of its own substantial form. Hence, it is difficult in classical substance language rationally to justify what the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 said about the two natures of Christ as "unconfused" and yet "undivided and inseparable."[21] But subjects of experience have internal relations to one another because, as Whitehead claims, they can incorporate their "prehensions" (subjective awareness) of one another into their own self-constitution from moment to moment. In similar fashion, ontologically distinct fields can be said to interpenetrate because their constituent members, actual occasions, have this capacity to internalize their relations to one another and thus to be internally and not just externally affected by one another. Accordingly, field-imagery in conjunction with the notion of subjects of experience in dynamic interrelation unexpectedly illuminates what the Church Fathers at Chalcedon seem to have had in mind with their celebrated definition of the two "natures" in Christ.

V. The Eucharistic Body of Christ

Turning now to the doctrine of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we first note that we are here dealing with the risen body of Jesus, not with the physical body which he possessed during his earthly life. As Bernard Prusak points out, many of the scholastic theologians in the Middle Ages who engaged in disputes about the "loca-

[21]DS 302.

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tion" of the body of Christ (whether in heaven or on the altar or somehow in both places at once) seemed to have overlooked this key distinction.[22] But what is to be understood by the risen body of Christ? Since in my neo-Whiteheadian scheme, physical bodies are to be seen as ongoing structured fields of activity for all the actual occasions or momentary subjects of experience within the body, I would argue that the risen body of Jesus is a structured field of activity that since the resurrection has been fully incorporated into the divine field of activity (the divine matrix, as indicated above) and thus is no longer subject to the constraints of exact location within the space-time continuum. It is co-extensive with the infinite field of activity proper to the Divine Word. During his lifetime, for example, Jesus could only be in one place at a time and, if he changed location, he moved gradually, in effect, one step at a time. According to the gospel accounts of his appearances to the apostles and the holy women after his resurrection, he appeared and disappeared at will, thus exhibiting a freedom from the constraints of location in the space-time continuum. His body is thus no longer a strictly physical reality located in space and time, but has become a primarily spiritual reality which can materialize or not at will, that is, become subject once again to location in the space-time continuum or remain free of those constraints as desired.

The issue may be further explained as follows. According to the Whiteheadian vision, materiality is the necessary consequence of immaterial subjects of experience in dynamic interrelation. What we perceive with our senses as a physical body is really a complex pattern of interrelation among actual occasions organized into various subfields of activity (atomic, molecular, cellular, organic, etc.). Once these innumerable subjects of experience have objectified or expressed themselves according to some determinate pattern of interrelation, then the field(s) of activity which they thereby co-constituted can be incorporated into the strictly immaterial field of activity proper to the divine persons and thus be liberated, as noted above, from the constraints of the space-time continuum. The actual occasions corresponding here and now to the risen body of Jesus, accordingly, exhibit the same basic pattern of interrelation which their predecessor actual occasions possessed during the earthly life of Jesus, but these transformed actual occasions are now operative within the unlimited field of activity proper to the Divine Word insofar as the Divine Word is, as noted above, in dynamic co-existence with the subjectivity of Jesus as the form or animating principle of his risen body.

[22]Paper presented by Bernard Prusak at the meeting of the College Theology Society in Milwaukee, 1 June 2003.

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In any event, given these presuppositions, it is relatively easy to claim that consecrated bread and wine on the altar table are an extension of the risen body of Jesus. Consecrated bread and wine, after all, like every other physical reality in this world are ongoing structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions from moment to moment. Before the Eucharistic prayer, they existed within the divine field of activity like any other material reality. That is, they existed in virtue of the divine life but as independent ontological realities in and of themselves. After the Eucharistic prayer (not simply the words of consecration but the entire Canon of the Mass), they become integrally part of the risen body of Jesus which is itself co-extensive with the divine field of activity. In Rahner's terminology, the consecrated bread and wine have become self-expressions or "symbols" of the whole Christ ("body and blood, soul and divinity" [DS 1640-41]), not simply of the "person" of Christ in a purely figurative sense.

What is even more important for the understanding of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, to be sure, is not the incorporation or "transubstantiation" of the material elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of the risen Lord but the intersubjective relationship thereby established between the individual Christian receiving the sacred species and Jesus as the risen Lord. The incorporation of the fields of activity proper to the consecrated bread and wine into the all-embracing field of activity proper to the risen Lord is then strictly instrumental to the conjunction of the subjectivity of the risen Jesus with the subjectivity of the communicant. If a non-believer wandered into a church during Mass and received communion simply out of curiosity, the non-believer would have the taste of bread and wine and nothing more. The symbolic reality of Jesus in the Eucharist is truly effective only for the believer who goes to communion seeking an intersubjective relationship with the Lord. But it is an intersubjective relationship, as noted above, with the whole Christ as risen from the dead.[23]

Rahner seems to make the same point in his article "On the Duration of the Presence of Christ after Communion":

> Christ really comes to us and stays with us through this sacrament. But this permanent presence, to which the reception of the body of Christ under the species leads, does not consist of the further pres-

[23]Clearly there are further implications here for Christian understanding both of the resurrection of the faithful departed and of the transformation of this world into the "new heaven" and "new earth" promised in the book of Revelation 21:1-4. Suffice it to say here that in terms of this scheme human beings will after death enjoy a transformed bodily condition and that the physical world, as St. Paul suggests in Romans 8:18-25, will share in the glory of the children of God.

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> ence of his body within the Christian for a few minutes longer. It is the continued and ever more profound presence of the Lord in the Spirit, in the truth, without which even his flesh profits nothing, as the Lord himself says. The climax of holy communion is this personal communication in the Spirit.[24]

VI. The Church as the Mystical Body of Christ

Turning finally to the notion of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, we note first Rahner's comment in "The Theology of Symbol": "When we say that the Church is the persisting presence of the Incarnate Word in space and time, we imply at once that it continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world."[25] From the perspective of my neo-Whiteheadian scheme, this is easy to justify. For, if individual physical realities can be conceived as enduring structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions (subjects of experience) from moment to moment, even more so aggregates or communities of individual entities can and should be conceived as structured fields of activity for their members. The notion of a human community as a field of activity for its constituent members may initially seem odd, but recall how in the history of Western philosophy repeated efforts have been made without much success to define the nature of community:

> Is a community, for example, in the final analysis nothing more than a collection of individuals bound together by a network of interpersonal relationships? Or is a community in some sense a new ontological reality over and above the ontological reality of its person-members, a *tertium quid,* so to speak, which obviously cannot exist without individuals as its members and yet is not dependent upon precisely these individuals to stay in existence?[26]

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the latter alternative seems to be true. That is, if, as Whitehead claims, "the final real things of which the world is made up" are actual occasions or momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, then not only individual entities, the persons and things of conventional human experience, but likewise the communities or natural environments into which they spontaneously aggregate, must be seen as ongoing structured fields of activity for successive generations of actual occasions. For, if the individual entity is a complex structured field of activity for its constituent

[24]Rahner, "On the Duration of the Presence of Christ after Communion," *Theological Investigations* 4: 319.
[25]Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 240.
[26]Bracken, The Triune Symbol, 18.

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actual occasions, then *a fortiori,* the fields proper to individual entities should in principle combine to form even broader and more complex fields of activity as the ontological basis for communities and/or natural environments on various levels of corporate existence and activity. As noted earlier, higher-level fields exist in virtue of the integration and coordination of lower-level fields of activity, but are themselves subfields within even broader and more complex fields of activity within Nature understood as a "system" of dynamically interrelated fields of activity.[27]

Once again, given these metaphysical presuppositions, it is easy to affirm that the church as a worldwide community of believers is an extension of the risen body of Jesus. If the risen body of Jesus is coextensive with the infinite field of activity proper to the Divine Word within creation, then the church as a community of subcommunities or in Whiteheadian terms as an integrated set of structured fields of activity can certainly be incorporated into the field of activity proper to the body of the risen Lord and thus by extension become the corporate self-expression or symbol of Jesus as the Incarnate Word at work in creation. As Rahner comments, "[t]he Church is of itself the final, irrevocable, eschatologically permanent word of salvation to the world. In it God has of himself uttered permanently his word of grace to the world, his last irrevocable word, which is no longer open to change in the dialogue of a history still running its course."[28]

As a specifically social and juridical reality, that is, as a community of believers with a well-defined pattern of community life, however, the church is not a symbol or self-expression of the Divine Word in quite the same way that the Divine Word is present in the human nature of Jesus or that the body of the risen Lord is present in consecrated bread and wine. On the one hand, as noted above, the actual occasions constituting the subjectivity of Jesus from moment to moment are perfectly harmonized with the subjectivity of the Divine Word so that Jesus habitually responds to the Eternal Father with the same pattern of total self-giving as the Word itself within the Trinity. On the other hand, the actual occasions constituting the consecrated bread and wine from moment to moment do not enjoy the same power of free self-determination as do the actual occasions constitutive of the subjectivity of Jesus. They cannot, in other words, refuse to become the body and blood of Christ as Jesus in principle could refuse to work in

[27]My thinking here is heavily influenced by the systems philosophy of Ervin Laszlo in *Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a New Paradigm of Contemporary Thought* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1972); see also my comparison of Whitehead's and Laszlo's metaphysical schemes in *The One in the Many,* 132-37.

[28]Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," *Theological Investigations* 4: 274.

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harmony with the Divine Word in the Divine Word's own relation to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christians, however, can through their acts of free self-determination from moment to moment resist becoming the self-expression or symbol of the Divine Word in history as Rahner proposes. They can refuse to mediate Christ to one another through their words and actions, and thus the church as a community of fallible human beings can in varying degrees fall short of the full reality of the Mystical Body of Christ, the final and irrevocable corporate expression of the Divine Word in human history. Rahner, however, is confident that at least in its sacramental structure the church will never cease to be "the final, unvoidable and intrinsically definitive sign of God's absolute self-bestowal on the world in his triumphant grace."[29] For this is what is meant by the *opus operatum* character of the individual sacraments. While I fully agree with Rahner on this point, I only take note of the fact that Rahner in his treatment of the church here is thinking of it more as a divinely ordained institution rather than as a historical community of believers. But even in the latter case Christians can powerfully symbolize both to one another and to non-Christians the presence of the risen Christ in the world, the efficacy of the Divine Word in history through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, they are indeed the Mystical Body of Christ even when they sometimes fail to witness to that fact as effectively as they otherwise might through cooperation with the action of grace. Christ is truly at work in them to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

VII. Conclusion

To sum up, then: in this essay I have tried to give an alternative explanation for the provocative remarks of Karl Rahner about the overall symbolic character of reality in "The Theology of the Symbol." While basically agreeing with him that being is necessarily self-expressive or symbolic, I believe that his defense of that claim could just as readily be justified through reliance on the metaphysics of intersubjectivity laid out in these pages. In defense of that point, I have applied this neo-Whiteheadian metaphysical scheme to the analysis and explanation of Christian belief in the Incarnation of the Divine Word in the human nature of Jesus, the Real Presence of the risen body of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the church as the Mystical Body of Christ. I leave to the reader, however, the final judgment here.

[29]Ibid.

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